

December 2002

Texas Trails -- Bulls and Buckram: A Visit to Archer City, TX

Raymond Walser

Captain, U.S. Army, james.walser@sheppard.af.mil

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walser, Raymond (2002) "Texas Trails -- Bulls and Buckram: A Visit to Archer City, TX," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 14: Iss. 6, Article 26.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3958>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.



Texas Trails — Bulls and Buckram: A Visit to Archer City, TX

by **Raymond Walser** (Captain, U.S. Army) <james.walser@sheppard.af.mil>

Column Editor: **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (St. Edward's University) <leonhard@libr.stedwards.edu>

Archer City, Texas sits in the flat, windswept brush land of North Texas between Dallas and Wichita Falls. Located almost 700 miles from the calming influence of the Gulf of Mexico, the town is subjected to both extremes of midwestern weather. In the summer it lies baking in the 100 degree plus temperatures while in winter it is blasted by icy Canadian winds sweeping unimpeded across the plains.

The town itself has no industry to speak of. It is most likely a product of the oil boom that became obsolete once the oil wells dried up. Think of the stereotypical Texas town and you will see Archer City. One four-way intersection with a flashing stoplight, a large city hall building facing onto a central square, and a row of squat vacant storefronts opening out onto the main street. It takes less than a minute to drive through the town and return to the flat open brushland of cows and oil rigs.

The question, which naturally springs to mind, is why would anyone want to go to Archer City, much less write an article about it? And in truth there would be no reason to visit the town unless you like books. If you do then you could spend a whole day in the town and not be bored. For Archer City, TX is the home of **Booked Up Inc.**, a rare and used bookstore owned and operated by **Larry McMurtry**. **McMurtry** is the popular author of such modern classics as the **Pulitzer Prize**-winning western *Lonesome Dove* and *Terms of Endearment*.

I recently moved to Burkburnett, TX, and having read about the bookstore in a number of articles, I was eager to pay a visit to the town and see it first hand. After looking at the map, I discovered that it was about a half an hour drive from my home. At the next available opportunity, I drove to the town and quickly located the store. The store is composed of four separate buildings, each containing books on various subjects. The first building contains the cashier's cage as well as a sort of showcase area with various rare and first edition books. I had visions of meeting **Mr. McMurtry** but I was immediately disappointed since he was nowhere to be seen. The only indication I had that he was even involved with the store were the Xeroxed pages stuck up on the wall that indicated he no longer signed books so don't ask.

The cashier was helpful, however, and she gave me a sheet indicating what type of books were located in each building and I set out to browse the area. The first building consisted of various biographies, political memoirs and literary criticism. It also had a section devoted to Texas history. In another room were stacks of yellowed pulp western magazines as well as books on the civil war and religion.

A walk across the street to building number two brought me into the history and literature section. There was also a large room devoted to oversized art manuscripts. If you are looking for lower priced books, this building is prob-

ably your best bet. There is an oversized paperback section that consists primarily of modern classics, which are the most reasonably priced of all the books in the store.

While I was browsing through the titles, a lady and her husband entered the building and began yelling "Yoo-hoo!" in a loud Texas twang. Being the son of a librarian, I was somewhat disturbed by this lack of book etiquette. Anyone who has any couth at all knows that you are quiet whenever you are around books. In their defense, this is what the signs posted around the buildings said you should do to get a salesperson's attention. On the other hand, I'm not sure they were meant to be taken serious and it was fairly obvious that there was no one in the store besides me. They continued to walk around and yell without any results. Then they carried on a loud conversation that seemed to echo throughout the store about how they couldn't find anything. "I can't believe it, all these books and no **Harry Potter**!" They left in disgust.

While walking through the store I saw several titles that interested me, however, I felt most of them were overpriced. I would estimate that the average price for a book was \$25-\$30 dollars although some of the paperback books were as low as \$3. As for the most expensive book, I did not ask.

Building 3 contained many different foreign language books as well as a large variety of turn of the century popular works long since gone out of print. It also proved to be the location of the bathroom. This was quite convenient since after two hours of browsing I was in need of a facility. While browsing through building 3, I found a hardbound copy of *Under Two Flags* by **Ouida** that seemed reasonably priced at \$3.

Building 4 was arguably the largest and least organized of the stores. It contained many modern works as well as an art, travel and science section. There were stacks of books, many of them duplicates of books from other areas of the store. There were also quite a few signed copies in here. There were at least five, each, signed copies by authors such as **Lawrence Durrell** and **Allen Drury**. In another section devoted to boats, I found a novel that was autographed by the author to **William L. Shirer**, the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. There was no way to tell if a book was autographed unless you opened it. It was up to the browser to take the book off the shelf and discover what lay inside.

I had spent the better part of the day between the four stores and had picked out a few books. I quickly stopped into **3 Dog Books**, another bookstore in the town, but did not find much of interest. After spending five hours browsing

continued on page 81


Talk of the Trade from page 79

More Writier in Residence News: British Author Negotiates Macmillan Contract from His Free Room

Jeffrey Archer, long time best selling author and knight of the realm, was allowed to meet with representatives from **MacMillan Publishing Company** in his prison cell. **Archer** ran afoul of the law last year, some lack of judgment issue involving bribery, prostitutes, and perjury, resulting in his free room courtesy of the Home Office. Since "deprivation of liberty has traditionally meant that one is deprived of the right to continue one's normal business", *The Independent* wondered how **Archer** and **MacMillan** were allowed to conduct their normal business. The Home Office responded to the newspaper's inquiry, at first saying the questions were too general, and then complaining the questions were too specific. Finally, a spokesperson said that Visiting Orders ask the reasons for the requested visit, and that "business is not supposed to be on the agenda." It was unclear whether **MacMillan** or **Archer**

fibbed on the visit request. Or perhaps the publishing folks just wanted to drop by and chat about the prison's rendition of bologna sandwiches, whether they use ketchup alone or mix in a little mustard to crank them up a notch.


Don't Read This If You Are Hungry (or Dieting)

At a recent nine eleven charity event sponsored by *The New Yorker* magazine, your correspondent enjoyed food prepared by some of my town's best chefs. All recipes were inspired by descriptions of meals featured in the chefs' favorite books. Among them, from the restaurant **Quest**, omelets with truffles and shitake mushrooms from **Escoffier's Memoirs of My Life**; from **Aquavit**, herring sushi with green tea mustard from *Memoirs of a Geisha*; from **Fiamma**, panzanella with gulf shrimp from *Under the Tuscan Sun*; and **Grammercy Tavern's** chocolate caramel tarts inspired by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Proceeds of the dinner were donated to the families of restaurant workers killed in the **Windows on the World**, located at the top of the twin towers. Like the chocolate, the event was bittersweet. 

the other stores, the little two-room shop seemed anticlimactic. I walked back to store number one to purchase my books. I was disappointed to discover that my reasonably priced, *Under Two Flags*, was not so reasonably priced after all. "Mr. McMurtry usually writes the prices on the second page," the cashier informed me. The book turned out to be \$20 so I put it back. I did however purchase a hardbound reprint of all the *Scribner's Monthly* magazines for 1871 that had caught my eye and seemed reasonably priced at \$10.

I left Archer City and returned home having spent a pleasant day rifling through old books. I also had an idea of some books that I wanted to purchase. I searched on the Internet and found them much more reasonably priced and bought them there. I thought of McMurtry's vision of a town of nothing but bookstores and café's where people sat and drank espresso and debated Hemingway and Faulkner while leafing through their works. It seems like a pleasant idea but, unfortunately, Mr. McMurtry probably couldn't have picked a worse place to do it. In the summer it's too darn hot for espresso and if you're out too long in the winter wind

you're liable to get frostbite. The closest big city is Dallas, almost two hours away, and the local populace probably knows more about Ernest Borgnine than Ernest Hemingway. Now if he were to open a fifth store with nothing but mass-market paperbacks and Harlequin romances, the town might gain some popularity. But whether the town is economically viable is beside the point. If you ever happen to be in the Dallas area for an extended period a time, the town warrants a trip. Just make sure you give yourself plenty of time.

Postscript: I believe there is also a **Booked Up** store in New York City although I have no first-hand knowledge. 

Sense and Sensibility — Saving yourself into the poor house...

by Margaret Landesman (Head, Collection Development, Marriott Library, 295 S. 1500 E. University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112; Phone: 801-581-7741) <margaret.landesman@library.utah.edu>

Saving yourself into the poor house...

Perhaps it might be a good thing, especially when thinking about life four or five years down the road, to look more closely at these tempting small "incremental expenditures" for "Big Deals." "Saving yourself into the poorhouse" is what my mother — or perhaps it was my grandmother — used to call it.

Just spend a bit more to get lots and lots of good stuff.

I remember life as a teen-teenager allocated a clothing budget of \$25 a month. I went out to buy a sweater. I came back with two. Kind of a lot of money — more than I had planned to spend for sweaters. But it was two-for-one! I had saved a lot of money. Well, yes, said my mother — you could go out and buy some more and save twice as much. You could save yourself "right into the poor house."

I somehow doubt that they had poor houses in southern California in the 1920s. Or on Nebraska farms thirty years earlier. But my mother and grandmother understood the temptations of small incremental expenditures.

Sometimes such an offer is a bargain. And sometimes it is just a temptation to spend more money than you really planned to on something that you would not have otherwise have bought. At least in some instances, it might have been prudent to resist temptation.

Publisher packages are seen as bargains — they lower the per title cost of the stuff you were planning to buy by spreading the cost over an additional batch of stuff you weren't planning to buy — but which users are very likely to find useful. You are, of course, also committing to continuing to buy the stuff you have been buying, whether or not you continue to find it useful, and to paying a further incremental cost each year on something labeled "inflation."

Having two sweaters is great. Then there are the socks that didn't get bought. Is the extra sweater worth foregoing new socks? I thought

so. (Even in Albuquerque, where the usefulness of sweaters is limited.) But at least some of the time, it might be better to have only one sweater and an ample supply of socks. And I certainly would not have been so naive as to sign up for a two-sweaters-a-year plan — at least sweaters are a one-time expenditure!

In 1996, the *Salt Lake Tribune* published an article called "Librarians draw a line in the Stacks." The article describes the decision of the **University of Utah Libraries** to cap expenditures with the most expensive publishers. There were a number we objected to, but Elsevier, being then as now the biggest, got the most attention. At any rate, we declared that we would not pay for the same number of titles any more dollars per year than we paid that year — we would refuse to continue to pay more and more for titles which were already costing more than they ought.

We canceled serials that year, and have canceled most years since — and we have used the savings not only to meet budget shortfalls but also to reinvest in several hundred new subscriptions to titles we had not previously held.

We have done this in a number of ways — varying tactics from year to year so as to examine over time all the titles in our collection. Some years we have looked at titles costing over \$100 a use. Or at titles with high subscription prices which appear to have less than five uses a year. Or at titles regardless of subscription price, including very inexpensive ones, which show no use at all. We have never actually targeted titles on the basis of the publisher's name.

Each year we have publicized a review list of titles we are considering cancelling. Some years we have also had a "watchful waiting" list — populated with titles which we might need to consider for cancellation in years to come. In all but the leanest years, we have actually canceled only titles to whose loss no objection was registered. (We do, of course, talk to faculty about paying attention to prices before de-

ciding whether or not to object.)



We are feeling pretty good about these decisions. We don't have the additional titles which would have come with the packages, but we do have lots of other new serials titles and electronic packages selected on the basis of user requests, reviews of the collection for accreditation studies, and other such criteria. And our

faculty seem pleased with the library and to feel that our services have — for lots of reasons, of course, not all related to collections — been steadily improving.

So what if we had not taken the road we did?

I was trying to figure out how the **University of Utah** might feel if, in 1996, we had, instead of drawing a "Line in the Stacks," signed a few "Big Deals." Would we be pleased, or would we be less pleased? Would our collection be better and our faculty better served?

I expect we would feel, whichever road we took, that we had made the right choice. These things aren't so clear-cut that it is obvious, even in retrospect, what the right choice is or was. And this is not a black or white thing — there are benefits and drawbacks to any given set of choices. Besides, given all the work and angst put into such decisions, the desire to believe, and even to find the numbers to prove, that the choice made was the right choice, is likely to be strong enough to ensure the conclusion.

Suppose though, that we had taken the other road and signed a "Big Deal" with Elsevier. Between **Marriott Library**, our main campus library, and the **Eccles Health Science Library** we were subscribing to 480 journals. Out of about 1,200.

A decision to sign a "Big Deal" for all 1,200 titles would have been a decision to add 720 new subscriptions. (And to promise to keep 480.)

What would we be paying for these subscriptions? How many uses would we be seeing? How could we compare cost and uses for these 720 subscriptions to costs and uses for other purchases which could have been made for the same amount?

When we subscribe to new journals, we certainly hope use will go up. And, as has been widely documented in "Big Deal" libraries, it does. What would that use have been on our campus?

continued on page 82